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ABSTRACT

This handbook is designed to help Alberta (Canada) elementary school administrators facilitate efficient and successful experiences for French immersion students receiving formal English language instruction for the first time. In question-and-answer format, it discusses briefly the following issues: what administrators need to know about students making the transition from French-only instruction to language learning instruction in both languages; why formal English instruction is introduced in the second or third year of schooling; how language arts in the two languages work together; what the teacher needs to know for a successful transition; which learning resources are appropriate; how English instruction is best scheduled in the class timetable; reasonable language learning expectations for transition-year students; helping the students experiencing difficulties in English; accommodating students with other kinds of special needs; providing support to the transition-year teacher; appropriate testing; expectations for classroom communication and activity; dealing with phonic confusions and invented spelling; and providing information to parents. Samples of 3 grade 3 children's writing, at the beginning of the transition year and 10 weeks later, are also presented, with comments on specific areas of progress in English composition. (MSE)

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Language Learning In French Immersion Classrooms In The Transition Year

Information For **School Administrators**

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L anguage Learning

I n

F rench Immersion Classrooms

I n The Transition Year

I nformation For **School Administrators**

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Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook is designed to help administrators facilitate efficient and successful experiences for a unique group of students, French immersion students who are receiving formal instruction in English for the first time.

For more information, refer to *Language Learning in French Immersion Classrooms in the Transition Year: Information for Language Learning Teachers (Alberta Education, 1992).*

What do administrators need to know about students who are making the transition from French-only instruction to language learning instruction in both French and English?

These students bring a wealth of language and learning skills from their French language arts experiences. They began school with a good understanding of language and how it works, and these understandings have continued to develop. Teachers can capitalize on the students' previous experiences, both as learners and as language users, when they begin formal (and informal) language learning instruction in English.

Why is formal instruction in English usually introduced in the second or third year of schooling?

For most children in French immersion, English was the first language learned and used in their homes and communities. Because French is a new language for the students, the school program focuses on French first. So that students are not confused by having to learn in two languages at the same time, the first few years are devoted to allowing them to learn in French only.

After three years in school, most students are working well in French and have learned much about how they can use language to learn - through speaking, listening, reading and writing. They are now ready to use the English language at school to continue to learn - through speaking, listening, reading and writing, but in another language.

How do English language learning and French language arts work together?

The principles underlying both French and English language learning place an emphasis on language as a tool for learning and for communication. These principles, as set out in the language learning curriculum, are:

- Learning and language growth are closely interwoven.
- Meaning is central to language learning.
- Language learning builds on what learners already know about and can do with language.
- Language is learned from demonstrations of language in use.
- Language is learned in supportive environments.
- Language learning is enhanced through interaction.
- In and of itself, language can be a source of satisfaction and delight.

What does a teacher need to know and be able to do in order to effectively introduce English language learning instruction to French immersion students?

Primarily, the teacher needs to have an understanding of how the French and English programs can complement one another and be able to recognize opportunities to maximize this relationship.

The teacher has to have an understanding of the language learning process and how it is possible to make transferences when working across languages. The teacher should be able to identify aspects of one language that may interfere with the acquisition of another. The teacher should be willing to create a learning environment characterized by mutual trust and respect, in which students are encouraged to explore and experiment with language.

Which learning resources are most appropriate for introducing English language learning to students in the transition year?

Alberta Education's English language learning course outline identifies a wide range of resources that can be used with students in the transition year.

In most cases, if the students are in their third year of schooling, all basic language learning resources identified as suitable for levels 3-4 can be used as a starting point. This unique group of learners can enjoy, relate to, and comprehend these materials - given a teacher who understands how to use a wide variety of strategies that will allow the students to experience success.

Teachers using these resources must be selective. In general, the resources are written to provide comprehensive language learning experiences for students who are at level 3-4 of language learning. They can provide only part of the language learning experiences that students need. (The same is true for the French language learning resources.) Care must be taken to consider exactly which objectives are appropriate to the students' language learning needs.

Most basic student learning resources are organized into clusters of several optional topics (such as *animals*, *winter*, *food*) that the teacher can use to develop themes for students to explore over the course of the school year. The selections in the clusters are sometimes grouped according to genre (humour, mystery, folktales, etc.). Because the clusters tend not to be developed sequentially or developmentally, the teacher can select topics and themes that are best suited to the students' language learning needs. There is absolutely no requirement for students to work through the complete content of a text or program to develop their language learning skills. Teachers will need to ensure that students have opportunities to experience a wide variety of texts and genres. Care should be taken not to deal with too many topics during the course of one school year.

The school library can be an invaluable language learning resource as it provides a wide range of additional materials that can accommodate the great variety of student interests and capabilities.

How is English language learning best scheduled into the class timetable?

Large blocks of time (under normal circumstances, at least one hour each day) should be scheduled for English language learning. This will provide opportunities for transition-year students to learn, develop and practice their English learning skills and strategies.

What are reasonable language learning expectations for transition-year students?

Most students begin school with a good, working understanding of language. From that time on, they constantly refine their language learning abilities in their French language arts classes as well as in their home and community life. Formal reading and writing instruction to develop their skills in English should build upon this foundation. Students who are making the transition need time to sort out language elements that interfere (certain phonic elements, spelling and

syntactic patterns, for example). This may take considerably longer than a single year of exposure to formal language learning in English. However, experience and research clearly indicate that, given time, students will learn to control all of the elements of both languages.

What can be done to help children who are experiencing difficulties in English?

It is quite normal for students to feel anxious and unsure when they first receive formal English language learning instruction. Initially, they are often unaware of how much they know about reading and writing that works in both languages (sometimes called points of transfer). In addition, they may not be aware of how much they already know about reading and writing in the English language. The teacher and administrator must ensure that normal adaptations to new language learning experiences are not perceived as learning difficulties.

Students often have particular learning difficulties in both language situations. After allowing for normal adaptation problems, teachers and administrators should address these particular learning difficulties. It would be helpful to consult with resource personnel if they are available. The Diagnostic Reading Program (Alberta Education, 1986) is a useful tool for identifying reading strategies that the student may not have developed previously; the program provides approaches the teacher can use to help transitional students become strategic readers. *Learning Disabilities: A Resource Manual for Teachers* (Alberta Education, 1986) is another helpful resource for teachers.

How can children with other types of special needs be accommodated?

French immersion students represent a heterogeneous group. As with any normal group of children, some will need ongoing support and assistance, while others will need stimulation to accommodate their giftedness. Again, it would be helpful to consult with resource personnel. *Teaching Thinking: Enhancing Learning* (Alberta Education, 1990) and *Educating Gifted and Talented Students Teacher's Manual* (Alberta Education, 1986) are useful resources when planning programs that are responsive to the needs of individual students.

What support can administrators provide for the transition-year teacher?
Teachers who are introducing English language learning to French immersion students for the first time may feel unprepared and unsure. They may resort to isolated teaching of skills and a reliance on homework to compensate for a perceived lack of ability in their students. Administrators can help such teachers. The teacher needs to know that the student has been developing learning and communication skills and strategies in the French language arts program, and how these abilities readily transfer to English language learning. A teacher who understands this process and who is confident that language learning transfers will take place is in an ideal position to provide the kinds of experiences that children need.

One useful administrative intervention is to encourage and support opportunities for teachers to grow through observing their peers at work and by discussing with each other what works well. Teachers can learn a lot from one another, and many problems can be worked out through collaborative discussion.

What kinds of testing provide the most useful information for teachers and administrators at the beginning of the transition year?
Standardized testing early in the program should be avoided. These tests are normed on the regular level 3-4 English population and therefore cannot provide valid information about this unique student group. Also, children beginning an English language learning program may feel anxious and somewhat inadequate. Testing at this stage could increase these feelings. Teachers and administrators should therefore rely heavily on formal and informal observations in the context of the students' daily language learning activities. The Diagnostic Reading Program published by Alberta Education can be used successfully to help in student assessment and program planning. In addition, the English language learning component of the Program of Studies provides excellent frameworks for describing students' levels of language performance.

What should administrators expect to see happening in a transition-year English language learning classroom?

Because students' strengths in English will likely be in listening and speaking, administrators should see a great emphasis on student talk - with each others and with their teacher, and they should see children being read to and talking about what they have heard. In addition, students will be chanting, choral reading and reading with partners and in small groups. There will be a great deal of discussion focused around the building of charts, word banks, story maps and webs. These classrooms should be busy places where the teacher and the students work actively together as partners. In other words, the administrator should see exactly what happens in all effective language learning classrooms.

Should phonic "confusions" and "approximate" or "invented" spelling be of major concern?

Phonics. A knowledge of phonics (how sounds and symbols are related) is one of several cueing systems that children need to use as they develop reading fluency. Fortunately, students making the transition from French to English literacy instruction have already developed direct and intuitive understandings of phonics and can build upon these understandings. This means that all phonics instruction should be taught in the context of the students' meaningful reading and writing experiences. Phonics instruction that relies on workbooks and repetitive drills is a singularly unproductive, uneconomical and an unrewarding use of the students' English language learning time. Activities where students engage in reading, listening to, and talking about texts suited to their particular interests and abilities are much more likely to help the students to become fluent readers in both languages.

Spelling. Beginning writers, in any language, tend to rely heavily on writing down sounds the way they hear them. This "sound-symbol" spelling strategy allows them to represent their ideas, but it often creates a problem for readers who sometimes feel that this "invented" spelling will result in their never being able to spell correctly. This is not the case. As students progress as writers, and as they become aware of purpose and audience, they begin to rely on their visual memory of how a word looks rather than how it sounds. As these realizations develop, they move rapidly to more conventional representations of words in their writing.

Students in the transition year should be allowed, and even encouraged, to use approximate or invented spellings in their writing. Drills using spelling "lists", or the memorization of random words, will not help these students to become proficient spellers at this stage. However, appropriate spelling instruction is essential. Recently authorized professional resources such as *Spelling Strategies You Can Teach* provide a multitude of productive teaching strategies that can be appropriately adapted for use with transition-year students. Overall, the greater the opportunity these students have to engage in real reading and writing, both at home and in school, the greater the chances of their becoming effective spellers.

How important is it to hold information sessions for parents?

It is valuable, and often essential, to call a parents' meeting early in the school year to talk with them about the English language learning curriculum that will be provided for their children in the transition year. The following ideas will help parents understand the perspective from which language learning instruction is approached.

Parents should know that:

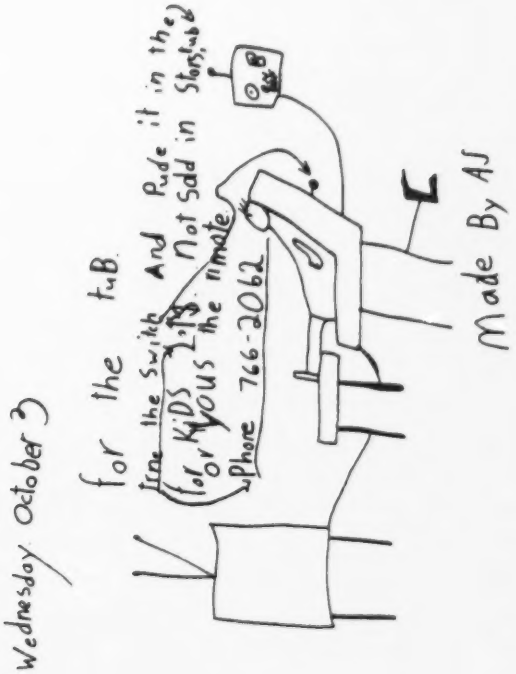
- During this early period there are a wide range of communicative competencies evident in the classroom.
- Children bring a wealth of transferable skills from the French language arts program to their English language learning.
- Initially it is quite normal for children to be anxious and somewhat apprehensive about their abilities and possible achievement in English.
- As with all new learning situations, it is not unusual for some students to experience difficulties, but these difficulties usually disappear as the students adapt to the new learning situation.
- Parents can play a key role in encouraging their children and in supporting them as they learn.
- Children whose parents read with and to them are demonstrably more successful in making the transition from French to English.
- In June 1990, French immersion students, as a group, performed as well as or better than their English counterparts on the Alberta Education Grade 6 Language Arts Achievement Test. (See *Provincial Assessment of Students in French Immersion Programs: Special Report*, June, 1990.)

Parents need to be informed and to develop and retain realistic expectations for their child's initial performance in English during the transition year. They need to understand that most children already have a good deal of knowledge about the processes of reading and writing and are able quite naturally to transfer this knowledge across languages . The children will benefit from a supportive and encouraging home environment that respects the time it may take for this transition to occur.

Samples of Students' Written Work

The following writing samples were written by three grade 3 students in a French immersion classroom during their first year of instruction in English.

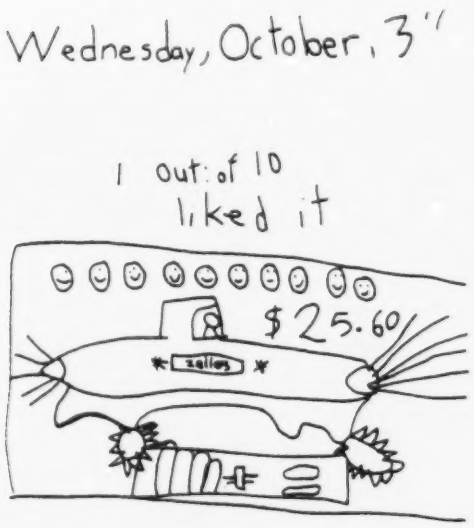
The first set of samples were written on October 3, 1990. The children had been enjoying a poem about bath toys and following a discussion of individual favorite bath toys, they had discussed the possibility of inventing new items for bath entertainment. They were interested in designing advertisements to promote the items. This open-ended writing experience is ideal in that it allows the children to communicate visually and to write as much or as little as they feel comfortable in doing. This teacher recognizes that the learners are at different stages in developing writing competency in English and so wants to encourage activities that allow individuals to participate in communicating their ideas. The teacher is able to examine the work of various students and make observations about some of the language understandings that students have.


Wednesday October 3
for the tuB
trne the Switch And Pude it in the
(for KiDS Not Sdd in Stors)
or yous the rimote
Phone 766-2062
Made By AJ

A.J. designed a fairly elaborate toy that was accompanied by fairly elaborate instructions. He tells us that the toy is "for the tuB". The user is instructed to "trne the switch and Pude it in the tub or yous the rimote." He also tells that the toy is "for KiDs" and "not Sold in Stors". "Phone 766-2062" and an arrow directs the buyer to the price "2,95$".

We can see that this student has correctly transferred what he knows about consonant sounds from French to English and that he has learned much about vowel sounds in English. He has incorrectly transferred the vowel sound represented by the letter/i/from French to English, (rimote) and has yet to learn the digraph /ur/ (trne). These can quickly be taught to him in discussion of this project. He will also need to be shown the reversed placement of "$" in English script. He has shown quite clearly that he is able to communicate his thoughts in writing.

Scott has greatly relied on visual information in creating his project. We see that he is able to communicate what his toy looks like, where we can get it ("Zellers"), how much it costs ("$25.60), and the fact that "1 out of 10 liked it". He self-corrects himself in removing the"s" from "out". He also knows the placement of "$" in English script. The teacher would want to encourage him to develop increased confidence to express himself in writing.



Alison appears to be a confident English user. She has good control of English vocabulary: "this amazing thing, is a bath toy. Ther is a switch control beside the arm rest" (labelled "Switch control"). She also labels the "foot rest" and the "Chair". She informs us that the toy is "not in stors" and to "Call 532-0198" for the chair which is "Made in Canada by Alison O'Toole". She provides a great deal of written information to accompany the visual. The teacher will want to help her acquire some language conventions such as capital letters at sentence beginnings and how to use the comma. It's nice to see her experimenting and this should be encouraged.

Ten weeks later, in December, these same students were working on a project (connected with the teacher reading The Best Christmas Pageant Ever) that required them to plan and write a Christmas pageant. We see a great deal of development in both the volume and expertise of these grade 3 students' writing.

A Christmas Pageant
planned by AJ

characters

1. baby
2. Star
3. 3 Kings
4. Mary
5. Joseph

Once upon a time three Kings were haveing fun. When Suddenly a big Star went over them IT was flyng quickly. The Kings ran after it. The Smolest Smacht into tow pepol. Oops I'm Sorry. "That's ok" Said Mary. The Star Stopped rite over top of Mary and joseph. The three Kings jumped up and

Said Mary. The Star Stopped rite over top of Mary and joseph. The three Kings jumped up and

A.J. has written a narrative. He has established the main characters, setting, problem and resolution. He has spelled many words capably and produces sensible recognizable spellings of words that he doesn't yet know ("no" for "know", "new" for "knew", "y" for "why", "rite" for "right", "allrite" for"alright"). He is learning to use contractions ("let's", "that's","were" for "we're"). He is experimenting with the use of dialogue and sometimes punctuates it correctly. He is aware, too, of other forms of punctuation and frequently uses them correctly. He also attempts to link ideas by connectives of time ("Once upon a time three Kings were haveing fun. When Suddenly a big Star went over them."). His written work shows the inappropriate use of capital letters that the first sample showed. This can be discussed with him. It is likely evident in his French written work.

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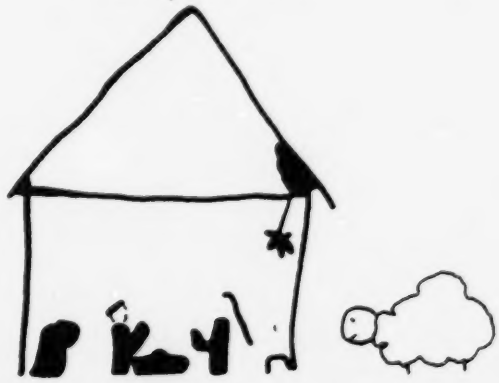
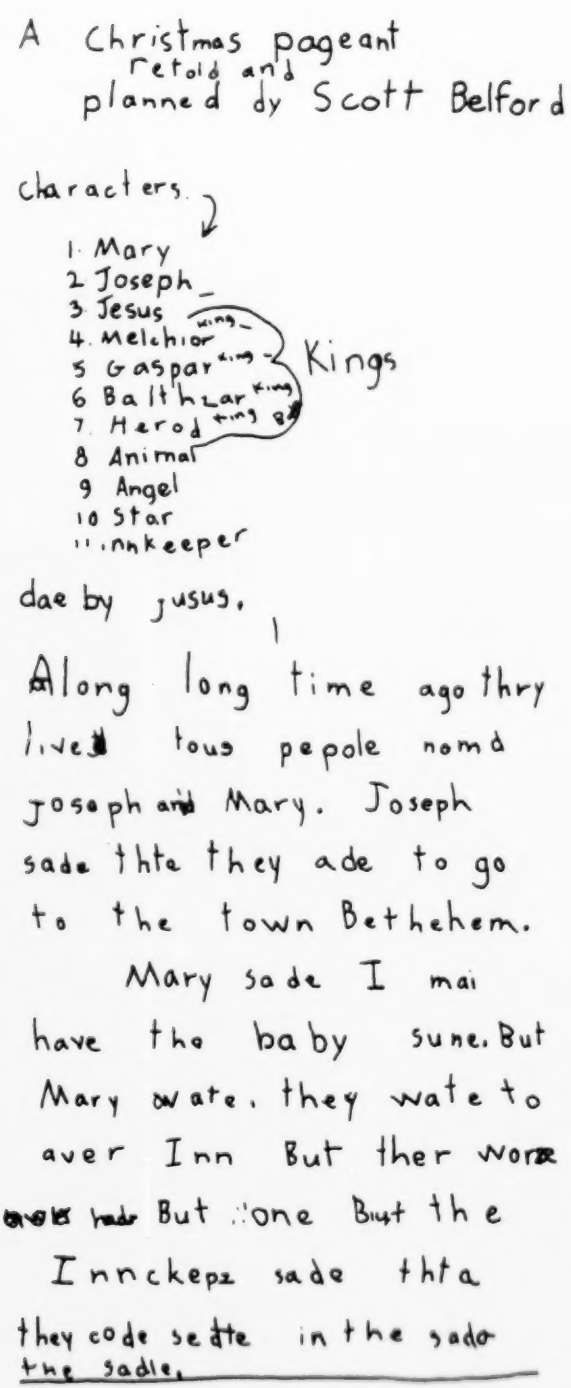
down. Hurrah your
having a King
for a baby.
Radical awesome
a King for a baby
joseph said.

That's allrite weth
me said m. We are going
to be rich rich rich
rich. Not all Kings
are rich. The Kings
asked were are you
going? were going to
pay our taxes. the
Kings new joseph. now they
no he payed the taxes
to them that's y
they are rich. I'm
having. a baby tonigh

I just no it
let's go to a
aport-mit. we
can find a Stable
y a Stable. that's
were I was born.
that same night the
baby was born.





A Christmas pageant
retold and
planned dy Scott Belford

characters.

1. Mary
2 Joseph
3 Jesus
4. Melchior king
5 Gaspar king
6 Balthazar king
7. Herod king
8 Animal
9 Angel
10 Star
11 Innkeeper

Kings

dae by jusus.

Along long time ago thry
live tous pepole nomd
joseph and Mary. Joseph
sade thte they ade to go
to the town Bethehem.
Mary sade I mai
have the baby sune. But
Mary wate. they wate to
aver Inn But ther wore
But one But the
Innckepr sade thta
they code sette in the sado
the sadle.

Scott is developing confidence in expressing himself in writing. His pageant plan is organized into two parts: "daeby Jusus" (baby Jesus) and "the star". Both sections are well developed and he uses approximate spellings to keep things flowing. We see that he reflects on his writing through correcting and changing as he goes along. He removed two characters from his plan after he began writing and his work shows erasures, insertions and changing letters. He experiments with sentence structures: "Along long time ago thry lived tous pepole nomd Joseph and Mary". (A long, long time ago there lived two people named Joseph and Mary.)

We can see that Scott is still sorting out a lot of things in the transfer of writing in French to writing in English. He is sorting out how to deal with dates "Decembre the 10, Monday 1990". He self-corrected in removing Monday from just after "Decembre". He doesn't have the correct order yet but knows that there is a difference. He has correctly capitalized December and Monday but has carried "the 10" from his French writing. He has called on background French knowledge to write "tous" for two and "mai" for may. He has used initial consonants accurately except for the d/b reversal) but is still sorting out vowel sounds and letter order in words. ("wate" for went, "thin" for then, "thte" for that, etc.) He has not yet learned how to

2 The star

they wer 3 kings and ther name wer Melchior Gasper and Balthzar. but thir woz a dade kirgs and is nam waze Herod. But the ther gode kings wine thiy wer wack: they sad a star, Big fine ine star youve aver sene. Fhy ve d.it the star ler ta daedy yesus. and they gave hime cise. and He gue up ta de Big and shang

The End

It is likely that Alison has been able to write in English for some time. She has easily transferred the ability to create and express ideas from French to English. It is also likely that she has been reading in English because she knows how English words look (pointy, donkey). Her work contains very few approximate spellings. This shows good mastery of English written vocabulary. She is willing to use approximate spellings to keep her ideas flowing when working on a first draft. (It is likely that she would be able to identify the incorrectly spelled words in this piece if asked.) Her approximate spellings are reasonable and show that she has much information about spelling possibilities ("inn ceaper" shows that she knows about the "ea" digraph.) She has correctly transferred what she has learned about punctuation. capitalize a title. Scott definitely has ideas to express and the skill and ability to organize those ideas. He is aware of the different conventions required in writing in two languages and is working at acquiring those conventions.

In this story the characters are:

1 Mary
2 Joseph
3 The three Kings
4 Jesus
5 The Star
6 Shepherds
7 inn ceaper

chapter 1

Once upon a time, there were two very kind people. There names were Mary & Joseph. One day Joseph said "Mary, we must go to Bethleham". But what if I have my baby there." Said Mary. "Don't worry Mary". So Mary decided to go. Mary rodeon a donkey, a tame gray donkey with long pointy ears, and Joseph walked beside her.

The first house said: "I have to many Children, and you are old inafe to take care of

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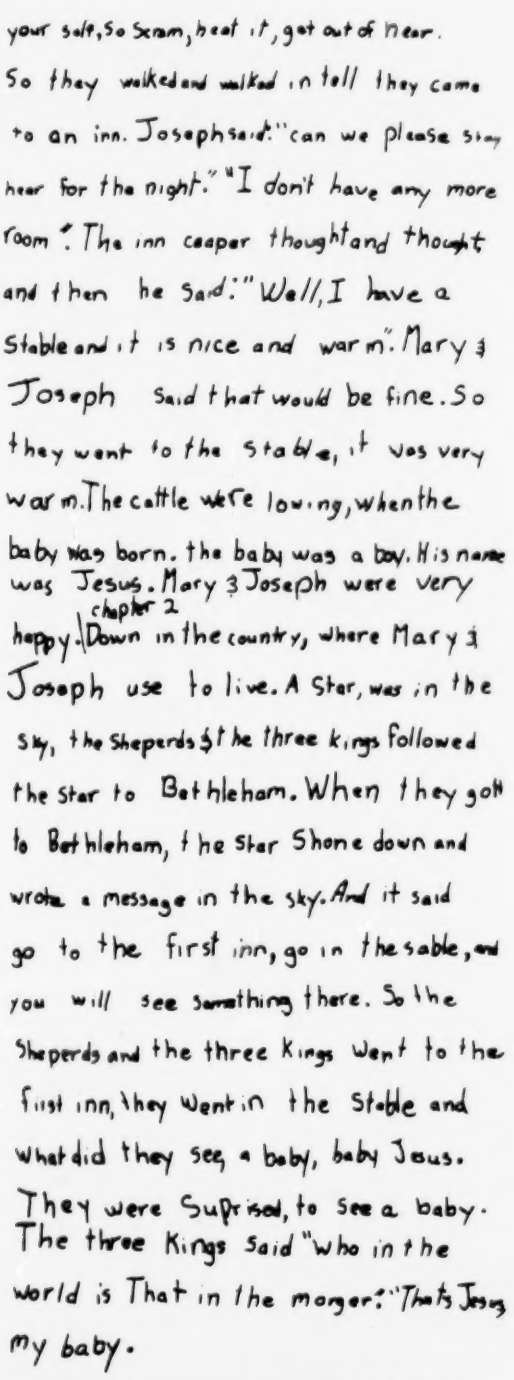
She knows when to use a period and is experimenting with the use of commas and quotation marks. She would benefit from instruction at this point because she obviously wants to use correct punctuation. She needs to know how to punctuate and paragraph dialogue in English and how to correctly use commas and question marks. She has made good use of capital letters in her work. Her sentences are grammatically correct and she is playing with using interesting sentence structure ("Mary rode on a donkey, a tame gray donkey with long pointy ears, and Joseph walked beside her.")



your salf, So Sram, heat it, get out of hear.
So they walked and walked in tell they came to an inn. Joseph said: "can we please stay hear for the night." "I don't have any more room". The inn ceaper thought and thought and then he said: "Well, I have a Stable and it is nice and warm". Mary & Joseph said that would be fine. So they went to the Stable, it was very warm. The cattle were loving, when the baby was born. the baby was a boy. His name was Jesus. Mary & Joseph were very happy. chapter 2 Down in the country, where Mary & Joseph use to live. A Star, was in the sky, the Sheperds & the three kings followed the star to Bethleham. When they got to Bethleham, the Star Shone down and wrote a message in the sky. And it said go to the first inn, go in the sable, and you will see something there. So the Sheperds and the three Kings went to the first inn, they went in the Stable and what did they see, a baby, baby Jesus. They were Suprised, to see a baby. The three Kings said "who in the world is That in the manger?" "That's Jesus my baby.

Like all students making the transition from writing in French to writing in English, these writers show continual progress and growth. They are willing to take risks and try things when they work. As they receive ongoing and consistent encouragement to take these risks, these children will continue to use and extend the knowledge and the skills that they have.

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